

Where “Art Meets Life”: Assessing the Impact of Dark Mofo, a New Midwinter Festival in Australia

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT

In Hobart, a litany of winter festivals flopped and failed until the arrival of Mona (Museum of Old and New Art), a private museum owned by mathematician, successful online gambler, and autodidact David Walsh. Since 2013, its new festival, Dark Mofo, reignited long-somnolent traditions of midwinter festival imaginaries among its postcolonial society and proved to be an effective vehicle for galvanizing an all-of-community form of urban activation, engagement, and regeneration. It has also completely overwhelmed the city with visitors keen to participate in a no-holds-barred ritual week with major global artists and musicians keen to be on its carnivalesque platforms. While Mona has explored grotesque realism themes of sex, death, and the body in its darkened, labyrinthine and subterranean levels, Dark Mofo has permitted their mix of carnivalesque and Dionysian metaphors and embodied practices/politics to take over the entire city in a week of programmatic mischief and misrule at midwinter.¹ Research by an Australian Research Council-funded study of Mona and its festive register will be used to account for its origins and innovation as well as its social, cultural, and economic composition and impact.

1. Adrian Franklin, *The Making of Mona* (Melbourne and London: Penguin, 2014); and Miriam McGarry, “The Mona Effect: Regeneration in the Dark” (PhD diss., University of Tasmania, 2018).

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Within this context public nudity, confessing sins, dancing in a cupboard and rolling on a gallery floor is acceptable—even expected.

—Luke F. Conroy, "Exploring a Mona Effect: Experiences and Impacts from the Ritual Space of a Music and Arts Festival"

Apart from Edinburgh's, few festivals transform an entire city the way Dark Mofo changes Hobart.

—Brigid Delaney, *The Guardian*

Introduction

This article relies on findings from an in-depth study of the making of a new private museum of art, the Museum of Old and New Art (Mona) in Hobart, and its impact on the city of Hobart and the island state of Tasmania, Australia—and in particular through its new winter festival, Dark Mofo, co-founded and organized with local arts organizations and the government. At the southernmost end of the southernmost state of Australia, Hobart is situated on the edge of one of the world's most significant wilderness areas and was originally colonized by the British as a convict settlement, to transport unwanted felons as far as it was possible to take them. Its dark history continued across its agricultural frontier lands with massacres of, and then a war against, Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples that almost destroyed them. In the 1980s it became an early icon of global environmental activism and the birthplace of the world's first Green Party. It is one of the most remote cities in the world, yet this remoteness has for a long time been the source of its appeal. Today, it joins many other secluded areas of the United States, China, Japan, and Europe as sites for art, festivity, and travel. Away from the cultural centers and arts precincts such places have been able to experiment with new forms of exhibition and immersive artistic experiences.

It is argued that the arrival of Mona has been a landmark in the recent history of arts-led urban regeneration and the so-called Bilbao Effect,² not only because it has deliberately fashioned itself as an "anti-museum," in opposition to conventional modern art museums, but also because its new designs for exhibitionary platforms in a festive register were scaled up from a museum to an entire city, and from a midsummer arts festival to entirely new and darker framings for art around the celebration of the winter solstice.³

This article will focus largely on Dark Mofo, which has become one of the highlights of the Australian festive scene and certainly its most successful and prominent winter festival.⁴ Following a first part that considers methodology and recent critical analysis of the festivalization of cities and its relationship with urban regeneration, a second section will consider Dark Mofo in its economic, political, and sociological dimensions. Whereas most urban festivals are initiatives of urban governments and are largely publicly funded and controlled with instrumental motives and aims, Dark Mofo was primarily the initiative of a private museum, the explicit goal of which was to effect social transformation among a broader art public. Indeed, Mona insisted from the beginning on the socially transformative aspirations of the contemporary art that it

2. The phrase "Bilbao Effect" refers to the seemingly miraculous success of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao (over one million visitors each year since 1997) and the urban regeneration it brought about. Built on the site of Bilbao's failed shipbuilding industry, the flagship museum designed by architect Frank Gehry enabled the city to move away from its rusting heavy industries and machine-age modernism and to restructure it around cultural industries, new service industries, and design and emerging technologies.

3. Adrian Franklin, "Journeys to the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao: Towards a Revised Bilbao Effect," *Annals of Tourism Research* 59 (2016): 79–92; and Beatriz Plaza, "On Some Challenges and Conditions for the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao to Be an Effective Economic Re-activator," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 32, no. 2 (2008): 506–17.

4. McGarry, "Mona Effect"; Tom Douglas, "Chills and Thrills as Dark Mofo Heats Up Hobart," *The Australian*, June 20, 2018; and Brigid Delaney, "Dark Mofo v. Hobart's Mayor: 'We're All Allowed to Dream, Ron,'" *The Guardian*, June 24, 2018.

5. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Athlone Press, 1999); Matthew Collings, *Art Crazy Nation* (London: 21Publishing, 2001); Justin O'Connor, *The Cultural Production Centre in Manchester* (Manchester: Manchester Institute for Popular Culture, Manchester Metropolitan University, 2000); Hal Foster, *Bad New Days* (New York: Verso, 2015); Franklin, *Making of Mona*; Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969); S. Brent Plate, *Walter Benjamin, Religion and Aesthetics: Rethinking Religion through the Arts* (London: Routledge, 2004); and Kate R. Barush, *Art and the Sacred Journey in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2016).

6. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

7. Ibid.; and Lewis Mumford, *The City in History* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

8. Bernadette Quinn, "Arts Festivals and the City," *Urban Studies* 42, nos. 5/6 (2005): 927–43; Donald Getz, "The Nature and Scope of Festival Studies," *International Journal of Event Management Research* 5, no. 1 (2010): 1–47; and Andy Bennett, Jody Taylor, and Ian Woodward, eds., *The Festivalization of Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

9. David Grann, *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI* (New York: Doubleday, 2017).

10. Leigh Carmichael, interview by author, May 10, 2013.

collected and on the socially transformative power of ritual and festivity in all human societies.⁵ While the museum was converted into a carnivalesque space for this purpose, the appeal of the winter solstice in Hobart was as a space and time for art where, and when, people were already intimately connected (both as residents or tourists) to a city redolent with transformational associations of a cultural, political, and natural kind.

This article will explain how in the largely Christian colonial history of Hobart, adherence to the Christian ritual calendar was diametrically out of sync with the seasons of the Southern Hemisphere, leaving the coming of the new sun, new life, and a new year unrecognized ritually as it has always been in the Northern Hemisphere—as a time of renewal, rebirth, and redemption. Winter festivals in the European tradition, particularly carnival, became associated with the presence, continuity, and indefatigability of local communities in their landscapes, where their collective body was expressed by an exuberant emphasis on the corporeal body, often in giant, fecund forms and in promiscuous association with their environment and nature, with an emphasis on the lower half of the body connecting opened orifices with each other and their world.⁶ Carnival also obtained its potent political charge as communities, especially newly walled cities and towns, used it to resist encroaching forms of military, religious, state, and commercial power.⁷ The emergence of Dark Mofo thus raises concerns commonly expressed by critics of urban festivalization: that it is driven primarily by tourist economic development, rather than a sense of place and connection to locality and culture.⁸ While such a focus is legitimate, we must also factor in the ritual significance of such places (and travel itself) for tourists who also seek transformation and redemption through art and festivity—and have done so since the beginnings of tourism. The article will try to understand whether Dark Mofo has become a vehicle for building better art publics from local communities, for building more vibrant city cultures, and for drawing significant flows of national and international tourists. Has it galvanized a stronger sense of attachment to/identification with place? Can a contemporary festival of music and art, typically so narrowly focused around central arts precincts and educated cognoscenti, be built on a whole-city scale and still engage others?

Dark Mofo: Transgression/Liminality/Anti-Structure for an Entire City?

Even though Mona opened in January 2011 to great acclaim and rates of visitation, the midwinter period proved to be a flat period for the museum, as it always had been for Tasmanian tourism. Consequently, Mona decided to launch its major annual exhibition at midwinter instead of summer and to stage a festival around it, "a good way," as the creative director, Leigh Carmichael, put it, "to attract attention to a brand beyond the museum walls."¹⁰ The tourism industry has often deemed the winter to be a closed season, a natural limitation to successful tourism in all places other than ski resorts or the polar regions. But Mona saw its salvation in the darkness and chill of a Tasmanian winter solstice. Arguably, midwinter festivals in Europe had always been the most potent.¹¹ The solstice was a positive, powerful time that resonated with Mona's brand and exhibitionary style, which plunged visitors into darkened spaces, used art to usher in transformative/confronting experiences, and was orientated to liberation from the past (see below for more aspects of branding and exhibition).

11. Patrick Collinson, "Merry England on the Ropes: The Contested Nature of the Early Modern English Town," in *Christianity and Community in the West*, ed. Simon Ditchfield (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 131–47.

12. Ibid.; and Steve Roud, *The English Year* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2008).

13. Collinson, "Merry England on the Ropes."

14. Leo Schofield, cited in Luke F. Conroy, "Exploring a Mona Effect: Experiences and Impacts from the Ritual Space of a Music and Arts Festival" (Honors thesis, School of Sociology and Social Work, University of Tasmania, 2013), 14.

15. Peter Timms, *In Search of Hobart* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2009).

16. Conroy, "Exploring a Mona Effect."

17. Kate Gould, "Dark Mofo Results," statistical summaries given to author in 2015, 2016, and 2018.

The Problem with Winter Festivals in Australia

For Christian colonizers of the Southern Hemisphere, the so-called ritual half-year of England in the Northern Hemisphere did not synchronize with Australian seasons or culture and it reversed whatever logic there was to the link between ritual, season, nature, and emotion. England's intense ritual season generally began at Christmas, at midwinter, and continued off and on until June/midsummer, and that was more or less it.¹² Not much of a communal festive character happened between St. Peter's Eve and Christmas, except in London where St. Bartholomew's Fair in particular provided welcome relief in late August.¹³ But in Australia, Christmas falls on midsummer rather than midwinter and Easter coincides with autumn not spring. Correspondingly, midwinter in the Southern Hemisphere (June 21) aligns with the beginning of the relative dearth of Christian feasts between midsummer and Christmas in the Northern Hemisphere (and Christian calendars everywhere) and has therefore remained unmarked by ritual or holidays at a time when the new year was most evidently beginning. So, for southern Australia, the busy period of ritual festivity of England became a protracted period of social hibernation without any significant holiday or ritual event from Easter to "Show Day" (an agricultural show with fun fairs that takes place on October 20), that is, the equivalent of up to 205 days, or 56 percent of the year.

After 1990, five attempts were made to reverse Hobart's midwinter somnolence through the introduction of a winter festival. There was Winterfest Festival, the Oyster Festival (both 1994), the Antarctic Midwinter Festival (2001), the Festival of Voices (2005), and Lumina (2010). None of them caught on as a defining winter festival and only the Festival of Voices still exists. Australia's leading arts festival director, Leo Schofield, said that these festivals lacked a sense of "authenticity": they were "vaguely themed; without historical precedent and unlinked to cosmos or culture."¹⁴ Art critic Peter Timms said that these festivals celebrated "when there is nothing to celebrate."¹⁵ None were on the solstice or about midwinter or actually about the culture of the local people or any people. None of them made connections between the content of the festival and the arrival of the new sun, most intending to distract from (or compensate for), rather than resonate with winter.¹⁶

And yet in 2013, when David Walsh (Mona owner), Leigh Carmichael (Creative Director), and Brian Ritche (musician and festival director) staged Dark Mofo, a festival to celebrate the winter solstice and winter itself, it rapidly became Australia's most important winter festival, as some statistics reveal:

- 280,000 people attended Dark Mofo 2015 (over ten days), equating to 28 percent more than the population of Hobart (this increased to 418,963 for Dark Mofo 2018).
- 6,886 people visited Dark Mofo 2015 from interstate or overseas (this increased to 14,934 for Dark Mofo 2018).
- It created the equivalent of 401 new full-time jobs in 2015 (or 6.2 million USD in wages).
- It was advertised in twenty-seven countries over three years, with an AVE (Advertising Value Equivalent) of 181 million USD.¹⁷
- It has injected more than 33.22 million USD into the Tasmanian economy since 2013.

18. George McKay and Emma Webster, *From Glyndebourne to Glastonbury: The Impact of British Music Festivals* (Norwich: Arts and Humanities Research Council/University of East Anglia, 2016), 17.

19. Robert D. Storch, "Please to Remember the Fifth of November": Conflict, Solidarity and Public Order in Southern England, 1815–1900," in *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century England*, ed. Robert D. Storch (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 71–99; Paul Simpson, "The History of Street Performance: 'Music by Handle' and the Silencing of Street Musicians in the Metropolis," Gresham College lecture, 2015, <https://www.gresham.ac.uk/lectures-and-events/the-history-of-street-performance>; and Collinson, "Merry England on the Ropes."

20. Geoff Ritchie, "City Hall Hobart," *On the Convict Trail* (blog), April 7, 2013, <http://ontheconvict-trail.blogspot.com/2013/04/city-hall-hobart.html>.

21. Simpson, "History of Street Performance," 6; Storch, "Please to Remember the Fifth of November"; and Martin J. Daunton, *House and Home in a Victorian City* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983).

To put this data into perspective, the Glastonbury Festival in England has an attendance of 177,000 people and the Edinburgh Arts Festival in Scotland (reckoned as the largest arts festival in the world) was around 450,000 in 2017.¹⁸

Rolling Back the Regulation of Urban Festive Space

Dark Mofo was designed to be, and duly became, an assault on the concept of the quietened (or deactivated) city where music, theater, public gathering, and traditional festive life had all but been silenced, removed, or regulated.¹⁹ Dark Mofo painted Hobart red, figuratively and literally, as it bathed buildings in red light and turned them into more arousing spaces.

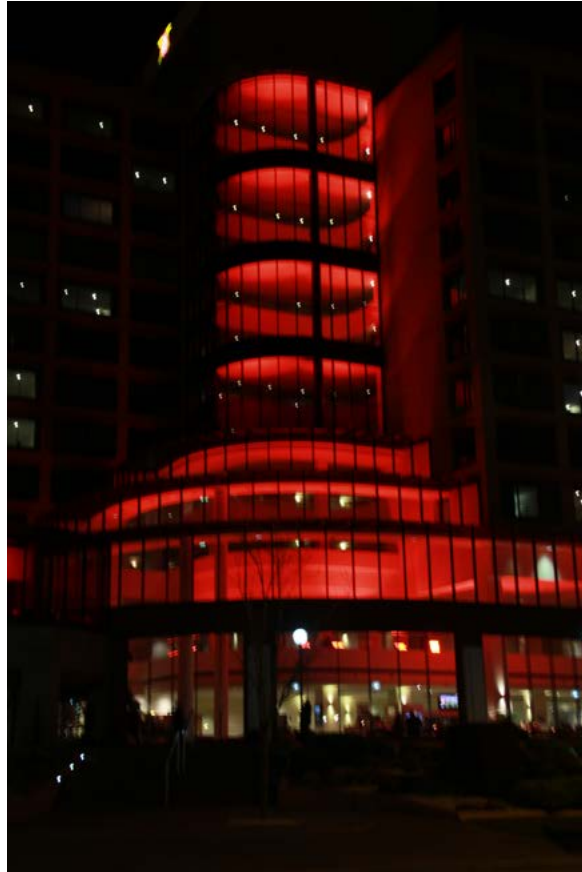


Fig. 1. Dark Mofo Hotel Illuminated in Red. Photo credit: Adrian Franklin.

As with most other Western cities, Hobart's once bawdy tradition of carnivalesque and street life had been tamed and rendered sterile and lifeless in the late nineteenth century, not least by building a town hall for "approved entertainments" over the carnivalesque site of the town's marketplace.²⁰ In this, it followed the deactivation of festive London and other British and colonial cities in the mid-nineteenth century. As historian Paul Simpson has shown, section 54, paragraph 14 of the Metropolitan Police act of 1839 substantially reduced, in one fell swoop, London's lively and rich tradition of street music, ritual, and performance. This was linked to a period of widespread urban cultural deactivation in most other cities and towns too, following the bans and restrictions on England's rich carnival traditions and the establishment of a police force to enforce the associated stream of new bylaws and street acts.²¹ This certainly included Hobart, where a range of street acts and bylaws restricted most spontaneous forms of social and

cultural expression from ever taking place in public spaces. Dark Mofo can be best understood then as a thoroughgoing attempt to reverse temporarily the cultural geometries of these regulations.



Fig. 2. Mona at Night. Photo credit: Mona/Rémi Chauvin. Image courtesy of Mona, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia.



Fig. 3. Entrance to Dark Mofo Feast, 2018. Photo credit: Mona/Rémi Chauvin. Image courtesy of Mona, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia.

22. McGarry, "Mona Effect."

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

In close partnership with the city council and its cultural program coordinator, Jane Castle, Dark Mofo was indefatigable in opening up long-silent public spaces for the public to engage fulsomely with music, performances, and art that would resonate with winter, the city, its people, and its times.²² Strategically, it built on the already-festive and carnivalesque space of the Salamanca Market, not Hobart's traditional marketplace but a space that was created by local artists in the mid-1970s before turning into a drinking strip, a meeting ground, a club scene, a de facto marketplace on Saturdays, and, finally, the only place where big crowds ever assembled spontaneously. Despite Tasmania's reputation for world-class nature and heritage sites, the Salamanca Market had been the number one tourism site since the 1980s. It was thus relatively easy to turn it into a feasting ground and to fill it with people at a winter ritual, especially with a very significant budget (a combined effort of the city council, the state government, and Walsh's philanthropy).

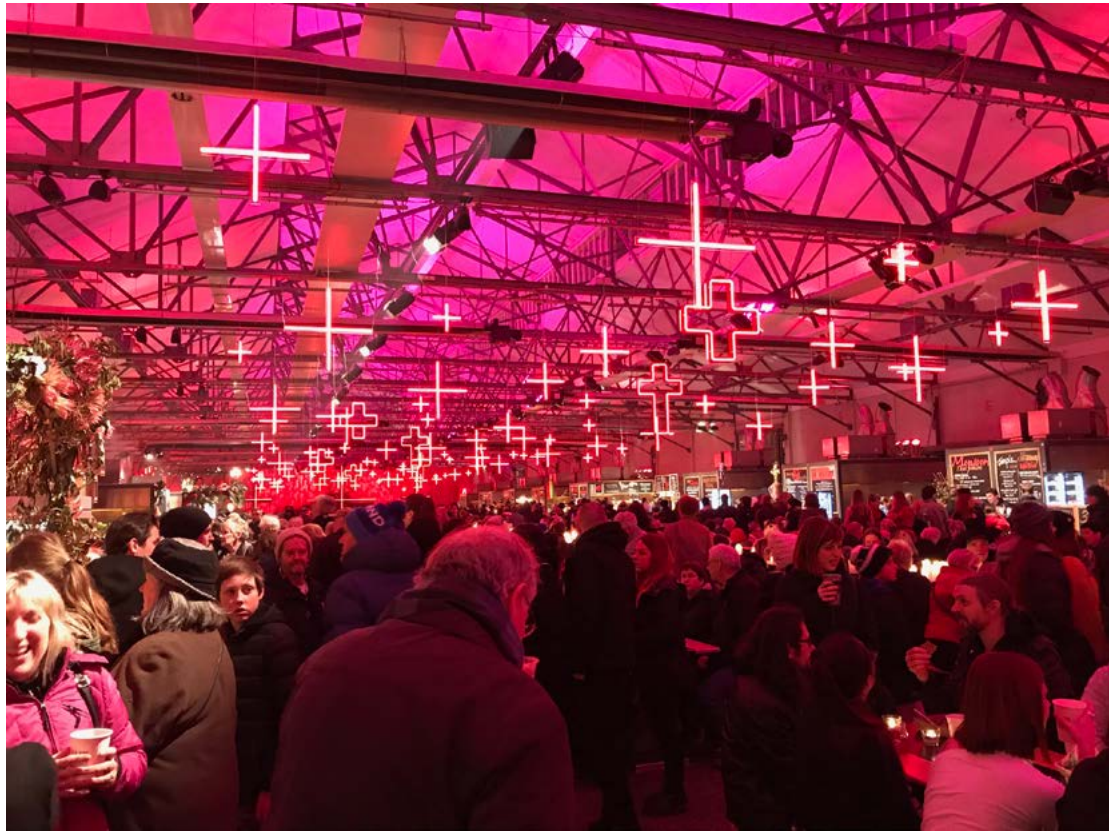


Fig. 4. At Dark Mofo Feast 2018. Photo credit: Adrian Franklin.

But Dark Mofo was not spatially defined or confined. It aimed to expand to all ends of the city and its hinterlands and become relevant to everyone.²³ It created impromptu bars across the cityscape and docklands in a network of exhibitions and musical performances, and made a public feast with the region's foods, wines, and spirits the center of its operations.²⁴ It created Dark Park—a huge area of barely used dockland spaces and warehouses—for play, performance, and exhibition. Doing so, it ignored or fearlessly contravened whatever bylaws stood in its way, whatever prevented it from being effective. It took over an abandoned psychiatric hospital, once a very dark and feared institution, to stage art, music, and performance. As arts commentator James Valentine observed, the very thing that made Dark Mofo successful could never have

25. James Valentine, "Hobart's Dark Mofo Leaves Vivid in the Dark," *Sydney Morning Herald*, June 14, 2016.

26. Notes taken by author at Mona Effect Seminar, 2014; and McGarry, "Mona Effect."

happened in his city of Sydney (Australia's main party city). Chastising Sydney in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, he wrote:

and then there are the fires. Lots of them. Standing around them are groups of people warming their hands. There's no barriers around the braziers. You can walk right up to them. It's fantastic because what happens at a fire? You greet everyone and everyone greets you. You immediately comment on the cold and then go straight to talking about what you've just seen. I walked up to one as a man clapped his hands together to his friends and declared, "Alright, let's go see some more shit we don't understand!" ... In Sydney, a symbolic fire would be lit. There would be a carefully guarded perimeter and I suspect by the time the committee finished dealing with issues of sustainability and smoke, it would be a mock electric fire powered by a battery charged on solar power during daylight.²⁵

By 2015, when the Dark Mofo organizers expressed a desire to build vertical grills to cook entire sheep (a nod to carnival as a meat binge) in an area close to public pavements, it was pointed out in a meeting with local council officials that there were many health and safety regulations preventing it. According to Castle, it was a Road to Damascus moment for the assembled council officials there. They could see only too well just how exciting, valuable, rare, and spectacular this would be and the objections were quickly stifled. Mona's continuous crossing of boundaries eventually showed the city how to activate itself culturally.²⁶



Fig. 5. Dark Mofo's Nude Swim on Winter Solstice, 2013. Photo credit: Mona/Rosie Hastie. Image courtesy of Mona, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia.

A similar incident involved Dark Mofo's plan for a mass "nude swim" at dawn on the winter solstice—predictably enough, choosing to stage it on the conservative social elite's Nutgrove Beach. The Tasmania Police found many bylaws that prohibited such an event, but, within a day, a city whose decision-making was otherwise *glacial* overturned all statutes to make allowances for nudity on the winter solstice. For Hobart's business and political elites, prudery and restraint

27. See, for example, Emily Bullock, "A Cultural Poetics of Contemporary Tasmanian Gothic" (PhD diss., Macquarie University, 2009).

28. McGarry, "Mona Effect."

29. Franklin, *Making of Mona*.

30. Pile Rats, "Leigh Carmichael Is One Dark Mofo," Pile Rats, 2013, <http://pilerats.com/written/get-to-know/leigh-carmichael-is-one-dark-mofo/> (accessed January 2, 2019).

was now considered a hostage to fortune in a city that was drawing large crowds to often very controversial forms of contemporary art and performance. Adding to this newfound permissive milieu was a new narrative of Tasmanian gothic that began to circulate around the same time Dark Mofo was launched.²⁷

Sexual license in public places was not restricted to the mass nude swim (if we accept that it is sexual) and was distributed throughout the week, especially at the various night clubs and parties using a system of unused cellars under the city. The centerpiece of Dark Mofo 2014 was thus the inaugural Red Death Ball, a luxurious and strange masquerade ball where Hobart Town Hall, no less, was transformed into extreme burlesque theater. Loosely based on Edgar Allan Poe's short story "Masque of the Red Death," the incognito crowd and a cast of "planted" clowns allowed the ballroom to become the performer, telling the tale of an anonymous dark force infiltrating a party that slowly spiraled into debauchery and eventually "death."

As these examples suggest, Dark Mofo is not a recovery of anything like "tradition" and remains contemporary in the issues it chooses to tackle. But it does set aside a period of misrule around the winter solstice and the new sun, as a time to consider issues of rebirth, reinvention, and change, to imagine oneself differently. It asks: why do we live like this? It recognizes the coming of a new year in a more meaningful Australian context. Without any conscious effort to research and recover recurring elements of European carnival, it homes in on grotesque realism, it emphasizes the lower half of the body, and it attaches to these an exuberant sense of its own continuity and growth. The festival's emphasis on feasting and its successful promotion of locally produced foods and drinks has ensured its persistence and continuity.²⁸ There is a sense of fleshy exuberance and luxurious abundance, expressed through giant light beams, bodies, organs, organisms, and fire. Certain elements, such as the Indonesian ogoh ogoh sculptures that were ceremoniously burned (along with the crowd's most pressing worries scrawled on paper) at the end of Dark Mofo 2016, have been directly borrowed from neighboring cultures. But most are associated with the Western contemporary art imaginary and popular culture and reference contemporary or future issues and themes.²⁹

Critically the concept of Dark Mofo attracted leading artists and musicians the world over, many asking to be included in the lineup. In its internal communications Mona's summer festival of music and art was abbreviated to "Mofo" and redeployed for the winter festival. But this not quite obvious compression had another meaning in popular "urban" culture, which few contemporary artists, musicians, and Mona's core followers did not know: it means "motherfucker," which can mean both bad or formidable, potent or impressive in some way. The pagan-inspired realignment of an Australian community to its own cosmology and natural rhythm, with its tropes of darkness, rebirth, reinvention, and regeneration so obviously linked to the possibility of transformation proved to be an attractive mix for the major artists and musicians that Walsh knew and aspired to collect and exhibit. In 2013 Carmichael told the bloggers Pile Rats: "As soon as we named it Dark Mofo people got it instantly. And when I saw the proposals coming in I was like, 'I think we fucking nailed this' [laughs]. People are onto it. They got what we were trying to do before we've even done it. It's resonating."³⁰ In 2016, the "demonic marching band" Itchy-O, from Denver, Colorado, United States, told of their properly festive experiences at Dark Mofo:

We knew to expect there would be the kind of compelling and challenging acts we love; however, the entire city of Hobart was taken over by art encounters curated to undermine all expectations (luminous large-scale

31. John Nicholl, "Denver's Otherworldly Marching Band Itchy-O Plays Dark Mofo Festival in Tasmania," Westword, July 24, 2016, <https://www.westword.com/music/denvers-otherworldly-marching-band-itchy-o-plays-dark-mofo-festival-in-tasmania-8035845>, cited in McGarry, "Mona Effect."

installation art, luscious and brooding film, a bacchanalian Tasmanian feast, blazing fire sculptures). Dark Mofo festival is truly quixotic. From the food to the art to the music and performances, it is an extraordinary sensory overload and an exquisitely curated ode to light in the dark winter night.³¹

Methods

This article deploys data obtained from an Australian Research Council-funded project titled "Creating the Bilbao Effect: Mona and the Social and Cultural Coordinates of Urban Regeneration through Arts Tourism." Over the 2012–17 period, a mixed methodology of participant observation/ethnography and sample surveys were used to understand and document the making of Mona, visitor experience at Mona and Dark Mofo, and the impact of Mona and Dark Mofo. Mona owner Walsh was interviewed numerous times over this period, as were Carmichael, creative director of Mona and Dark Mofo; Elizabeth Pearce, Mona writer; Olivier Varenne, senior curator; and Mark Fraser, who was museum director during Mona's development years. PhD student Miriam McGarry (now graduated) carried out participant observation in the Dark Mofo festival office and at all points around the festival sites. Other honors students and I augmented other forms of data collection through participant observation among festival crowds and festival events. In addition, research on the design and making of Mona involved multiple interviews with some thirteen principal members of the team, including all curators, the Mona writer, the architect, the engineer, collection staff, and departmental managers. The unfolding impact of Mona and Dark Mofo was also captured through regular Mona Effect Seminars between 2012 and 2016, which involved Mona staff together with representatives from the cities of Hobart and Glenorchy, the state government of Tasmania, Tourism Tasmania (a corporation that promotes leisure travel to the area), local teachers, other art spaces, the food and beverage industries, and the musical director of Dark Mofo.

To evaluate the impact of Mona on visitors and document and evaluate their museum experience we also conducted a non-randomized sample survey administered either face-to-face soon after respondents exited Mona's gallery space or online soon after they received the record of their museum tour from Mona's O Device (a handheld information device that records everything viewed and every type of information sourced about it). A nineteen-question schedule was designed comprising a mix of Likert-scaled and other direct questions taking approximately five minutes to complete. A total of 6,410 completed questionnaires were obtained from November 7, 2013, to November 6, 2014. We wanted our survey to reflect an entire calendar year because Mona's visitation is highly seasonal, with a very busy spring and summer season, and an intense period around midwinter during the Dark Mofo music and arts festival.

To evaluate the impact of Dark Mofo on the locality of the contiguous cities of Hobart (the capital of Tasmania) and Glenorchy (a working-class suburb to the north where Mona was built), we also conducted a representative randomized sample survey of 1,200 residents. We obtained data on rates of participation and perceptions about the contribution that Mona made to the life of the city.

Tourism, Urban Regeneration, and the Festivalization of Cities

Within the generic field of arts-led urban regeneration processes, the rise of the urban festival

32. Malcolm Miles, "Art and Culture: The Global Turn," in *Re-Imagining the City: Art, Globalization and Urban Spaces*, ed. Elizabeth Grierson and Kristen Sharp (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 3–24; and Justin O'Connor, "Regeneration Redux: Hobart and Mona," in *By-Roads and Hidden Treasures: Mapping Cultural Assets in Regional Australia*, ed. Paul Ashton, Chris Gibson, and Ross Gibson (Crawley: University of Western Australia Publishing, 2015), 169–83.

33. Quinn, "Arts Festivals and the City," 931.

34. Keith Bassett, "Urban Cultural Strategies and Urban Regeneration: A Case Study and Critique," *Environment and Planning A* 25 (1993): 1773–88; Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Oxon: Routledge, 1984); and Quinn, "Arts Festivals and the City."

35. Storch, "'Please to Remember the Fifth of November';" John Jervis, *Transgressing the Modern* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999); E. P. Thompson, "Rough Music Revisited," *Folklore* 102, no. 1 (1992): 3–26; and Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London: Ashgate, 2009).

36. Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum* (London: Routledge, 1995); Ann Jefferson, "Body-matters: Self and Other in Bakhtin, Sartre and Barthes," in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, ed. Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 202–25; and Jervis, *Transgressing the Modern*.

and attempts to generate significant flows of tourists to them has been significant. Yet what these have meant for the cities and their populations is not always clear; nor is it always clear what is regenerated. Some critics have seen little other than attempts to boost retailing and consumer spending.³² Similarly, the role arts festivals have played in advancing urban policy, contributing to urban life, facilitating the expression of cultural identities, engaging with art, and building social inclusion within art publics is far from obvious. Answering these questions is still hampered by a profound lack of detailed empirical research in the area.³³ The research on Dark Mofo reported here should make an important contribution. In theoretical terms, this research seeks to uncover the social dynamics behind contemporary arts festivals: what exactly is "festive" about them when so many are ostensibly programs of artistic performances that descend from cultural forms based on high cultural excellence and are focused on social elites, and, more often than not, perform a role of social distinction rather than inclusion?³⁴ The Adelaide Festival in Australia, the original early twentieth-century Glastonbury Festival, and Glyndebourne in England are typical examples here.

We know that in their modern guise arts festivals originated not from historical forms of European festive life such as carnival, which were grounded in popular culture, but often in opposition to, or as substitutes for, them. Indeed, ascendant Protestant industrial elites in northern Europe systematically banned carnival from the late eighteenth to late nineteenth centuries.³⁵ Some carnivals continued in toned-down or "pageantized" forms; others became commodified spectacles and representations, to join with other "improving leisure," such as museums, art galleries, and art festivals.³⁶ And yet, these mostly failed to develop the broad art publics their original founders intended and have remained predominantly the preserve of the educated middle classes.³⁷ The sociological significance of Dark Mofo resides in its intervention to recover elements of the carnival and popular cultural in an experiment to broaden the appeal of contemporary art, which is often considered to be esoteric and inaccessible.

Carnavalesque celebrations have multiplied in recent decades: some of them have been revivals of existing traditions (in Basque Country, for instance, carnival was a significant celebration until it was banned by Francisco Franco in the 1930s and 1940s), while others have even been planted in places where they did not exist (for example, many of the Sussex Bonfire Societies in southern England are new to their communities). Still, such festivals are mostly confined to the social and spatial margins (for example, US Burning Man and the post-1960s Glastonbury Festivals) and rarely staged in towns or cities of any scale, though the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras and the Notting Hill Carnival in London are exceptions.³⁸

The emerging seaside towns of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which often had a direct connection to previous forms of carnival, revels, or wakes in the British tradition, became places where music, art, and the carnivalesque were firmly reestablished. Brighton and Blackpool are well-researched examples of these "places on the margin."³⁹ The termination of many fairs and revels across the north European rural landscape had coincided with the emergence and popularity of the first waves of medicinal sea bathing—and then seaside holidays.⁴⁰ With the advent of the railways, entire industrial towns took to spending their traditional festival holidays at nearby seaside towns.⁴¹ The single largest working-class seaside town of Blackpool, for example, was recomposed and relocated from the traditional Lancashire towns' carnival tradition of

37. Bourdieu, *Distinction*; Adrian Franklin and Nikos Papastergiadis, "Engaging with the Anti-Museum? Visitors to the Museum of Old and New Art (Mona)," *Journal of Sociology* 53, no. 3 (June 6, 2017): 670–86, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1440783317712866>;
- Bennett, *Birth of the Museum*; and Adrian Franklin, "Art Tourism: A New Field for Tourist Studies," *Tourist Studies* 18, no. 4 (2018): 399–416.
38. Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin* (London: Routledge, 1991).
39. Ibid.; Edmund W. Gilbert, *Brighton: Old Ocean's Bauble* (London: Methuen, 1954); and Darren Webb, "Bakhtin at the Seaside: Utopia, Modernity and the Carnavalesque," *Theory, Culture & Society* 22, no. 3 (2005): 121–38.
40. Shields, *Places on the Margin*.
41. Webb, "Bakhtin at the Seaside."
42. Ibid.
43. Tony Bennett, "A Thousand and One Troubles: Blackpool Pleasure Beach," in *Formations of Pleasure*, ed. Fredric Jameson, Terry Eagleton, Cora Kaplan, and Laura Mulvey (London: Routledge, 1983), 138–55; Shields, *Places on the Margin*; and Webb, "Bakhtin at the Seaside."
44. Quinn, "Arts Festivals and the City," 928. See also Ann-Kristin Ekman, "The Revival of Cultural Celebrations in Regional Sweden: Aspects of Tradition and Transition," *Sociologia Ruralis* 39, no. 3 (1999): 280–82.

wakes; a move enacted essentially by the Lancashire textile industries (capitalists and workers) themselves.⁴² There, as elsewhere, the same utopian imaginary was reassembled among a unique and new festive space and architecture.⁴³ These, like Dark Mofo, were deliberately instituted for "recreation" and seen as a benefit in and of themselves. Critically for my argument here, they were constructed festive sites for specific (traveling) urban/industrial publics. Mona and Dark Mofo were both primarily established to develop sustainable flows of tourists, though with obvious and important gains for the local community too.

In casting her critical eye over the more recent, largely tourist-led, *economic* motivations for festival growth in major cities, Bernadette Quinn laments the lack of attention being paid to the social inclusion of citizens/residents and "non-economic outcomes," arguing that festivals were historically meant to express the sense of belonging specific to a group or place.⁴⁴ In creating opportunities for drawing on shared histories, shared cultural practices, and ideals, as well as creating settings for social interactions, festivals engender local continuity since they are cultural texts.⁴⁵ Quinn suggests that research into festival settings has shown how "a people's sense of their own identity is closely bound up with their attachment to place."⁴⁶ Here Quinn's work agrees with others who have seen attempts to grow significant flows of festival tourism as toxic on locality and community, resulting all too often in gentrification and development and the displacement of local people and culture.⁴⁷

While connections between festivity and locality are important (and to that end, this article will detail Dark Mofo's impact and engagement with its locality), Dark Mofo also affords the opportunity to look more closely at the non-economic connections such festivals have had with tourists and with urban regeneration. Arguably, tourists are not the same as the tourism industry or reducible to the consumerist and economically driven narratives often attributed to them. Dark Mofo, for example, embraced tourism and saw it in opposite terms: as a potent transformative experience and force. It aimed to: a) bring a flow of art tourists to Hobart; b) allow locality, tourism, and art to resonate through arts activities that take a ritually transformative form; and c) encourage travel as a source of positive predisposition (in other words, preliminary) for festive engagement. As in other cities undergoing cultural florescence, such as Manchester, England, in the 1990s, tourism could be a positive force, interacting positively with the locality. Justin O'Connor's analysis of Manchester's revival through the 1990s recognized that cultural tourism may be embroiled in an "active consumption" where "the local and global are received, mixed and commented on," resulting in the "exchange and transformation of ideas, images, sounds, meaning."⁴⁸

In Mona's design thinking then, travel was also a means for making visitors more receptive to the transformative capacities of their art and thus for creating a festive atmosphere around it. In their view, the festival provided a better metaphor for engagement with art than the classroom. It could therefore be argued that festival tourism does not necessarily reduce to economic/financial expediency and does not deviate from the proper business of festivals as celebrations of locality. Here we might say that Mona drew on a long tradition of festive and pilgrimage travel, a feature supported by the broad anthropological literature on the connections between ritual and travel and between ritual art objects and places on the social margins, as well as connections with transformative arts and representations in more recent traveling contexts, from the Grand

45. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Fontana Press, 1993).

46. Quinn, "Arts Festivals and the City," 928.

47. Miles, "Art and Culture"; Sharon Zukin, *The Culture of Cities* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); and Kate Shaw, "Melbourne's Creative Spaces Program: Reclaiming the 'Creative City' (If Not Quite the Rest of the City)," *City, Culture and Society* 5 (2014): 139–47.

48. O'Connor, *Cultural Production Centre in Manchester*, 39, 123.

49. Shields, *Places on the Margin*; Turner, *Ritual Process*; Franklin, "Art Tourism"; Fred Turner, "Burning Man at Google: A Cultural Infrastructure for New Media Production," *New Media & Society* 11, nos. 1/2 (2009): 73–94; Barush, *Art and the Sacred Journey in Britain*; and McKay and Webster, *From Glyndebourne to Glastonbury*.

50. Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967).

51. Peter Timms, "'A Post-Google Wonderkammer': Mona Redefines the Genre," *Meanjin Quarterly* (June 21–29, 2011), <https://meanjin.com.au/essays/a-post-google-wunderkammer-hobarts-museum-of-old-and-new-art-redefines-the-genre/>. Miranda E. Morris, "A Place in the Empire: Negotiating the Life of Gertrude Kenny" (PhD diss., University of Tasmania, 2010).

52. Mark L. Bruner, "Carnavalesque

Tour through Glastonbury, Glyndebourne, SXSW (South by Southwest festival in the United States), and Burning Man.⁴⁹ Where it differed was in combining tourists and local residents in an urban milieu. However, the extent to which it had succeeded (and might work elsewhere) was not known until we conducted the residents survey in Hobart.

Dark Mofo: Community Making and Renewal

Dark Mofo's art public includes the majority of local residents who at midwinter are "in residence" rather than scattered to holiday destinations as they are at midsummer. While they do not have the town to themselves, this is one of the few times they are variously massing, on show, promenading, fancy milling, decontrolled, and excited by their newfound ritual public spaces and their changed status within the national arts imaginary (Hobart is now considered a leading arts city and not a cultural backwater).⁵⁰ While not rising to the excesses demonstrated by the surviving carnivals of Europe (for example, some of the more lively Basque carnivals), Dark Mofo has nonetheless performed a spectacle of public revelry rarely seen in Hobart's recent past.⁵¹ Arguably, it is as much the spectacle of a town set loose from public order regulations (dating back to the nineteenth century) as the art itself that annually pulls in a visiting public almost as large as the resident population.

Visitors are always invited to join with communities in carnival and their presence adds to the strangeness and carnival's capacity to allow these communities to imagine themselves differently.⁵² After the first Dark Mofo festival in 2013, there was a unanimous call to allow Spectra, a light installation (a column of light beams that reaches into the sky fifteen kilometers above the city) by Japanese visual and sound artist Ryoji Ikeda, to be adopted as a permanent place symbol for Hobart, its Eiffel Tower. After some four years, this ambition has now come to pass, with its inauguration at Dark Mofo in June 2018. Spectra can now be seen from the



Fig. 6. Festivalgoers among the Spectra Spotlights. Artist: Ryoji Ikeda (b. 1966). Photo credit: Adrian Franklin.

Protest and the Humorless State,"
Text and Performance Quarterly
25, no. 2 (2005): 136–55.

53. Valentine, "Hobart's Dark
Mofo Leaves Vivid in the Dark."

54. Elizabeth Farrelly, "Building
Breaks the Mould for All the Right
Reasons," *Sydney Morning Her-
ald*, November 3, 2012.



Fig. 7. Spectra (Tasmania). Artist: Ryoji Ikeda (b. 1966).
Photo credit: Mona/Rémi Chauvin. Image courtesy of Mona, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia.

backyards of almost every resident, and in that sense it has become both a beacon to engage and a symbol of the community.

It is important not to ascribe too much agency to Mona. To be sure, the organizers of Dark Mofo have been choreographers of immersive art experiences that, by and large, make strong statements. Such Sydney/national cultural commentators as Valentine have marveled at Dark Mofo, arguing that this could NOT happen in Sydney.⁵³ Indeed, the urban authorities in Sydney are currently engaged in deactivating what was Sydney's surviving carnivalesque nighttime economy, a series of large pubs in the Oxford Street area that formed a nursery hub for Sydney's historically successful music industry.⁵⁴ But one also needs to recognize that Mona has radically "underdetermined" what has come to pass in the museum and festival in order to allow others to act and create festive events. In other words, they have given artists and their publics (local and visiting) far more to do than at most festivals; they are more participants than spectators.

Local Engagement and Impact

To get a reliable understanding of how many people from Hobart and Glenorchy attended Mona and Dark Mofo, our research team carried out a representative survey of residents. We wanted to know what proportion of residents attended Dark Mofo and Mona and whether residents valued it.

55. Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Art Gallery and Museum Attendance," Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011.

As the mothership museum, Mona attracted a majority of residents from both cities. About 75 percent of the people of Hobart and 63 percent of the people of Glenorchy had been at least once to Mona in the previous year. Over 25 percent of Hobartians and over 20 percent of Glenorchians had been more than twice.

More significant, perhaps, was the numbers of local residents that appeared to have found something of *value* at Mona. Among those from Hobart and Glenorchy who had been to Mona at least once, we found that 62.8 percent of the non-university educated continued to visit Mona after their first trip there (with 49 percent becoming regulars). And while university-educated locals had a higher rate of attendance (75 percent continued to visit Mona after their first visit, with 60 percent becoming regulars), this degree of convergence was not expected.

To put this in context, in 2009–10 the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that only 20 percent of Australians with no university qualifications had attended an art gallery across Australia in the previous year. But they also found that only 43.5 percent of Australians with bachelor's degrees had attended an art gallery in the previous year.⁵⁵ So Mona, which opened in 2011, can claim an attendance rate for its non-tertiary-educated state citizens that is greater than those with bachelor's degrees nationally. Not everyone likes all art, and we found many who did not like art at Mona. But the interesting point is that they had formed an opinion of it and could express it to the researchers. They had joined the conversation.

What about Dark Mofo? Across both cities, 65 percent of the non-university educated had attended, versus 82 percent of the university educated. Again, one would have anticipated the university educated to be more represented in attendance figures for contemporary arts but certainly not two-thirds of the non-tertiary educated.

About 75 percent of the people of Hobart had attended Dark Mofo, as had 60 percent of the people of Glenorchy. And while it is still true that a greater proportion of the university educated had attended, the difference was even less in Hobart, where there was a very narrow difference, 83 percent university educated versus 75 percent non-university educated. In Glenorchy, one of the most socially disadvantaged municipalities in Tasmania (it is in the top decile of social disadvantage across Australia), the difference was greater as expected, but it was nevertheless 81 percent versus 56 percent. These are big numbers for such a place and these numbers show that staging arts festivals in such areas can be valuable and successful. The museum has been a conduit to inclusion in this citywide festival and here we can identify a role that other museums might easily follow.

We also found that more people in each city had attended each successive Dark Mofo, and there is no reason to suppose that will not continue. A high proportion of eighteen-to-twenty-four-year-olds attend Dark Mofo (82 percent), as do the twenty-five-to-thirty-four-year-olds (76.2 percent), whereas participation declines among the older groups (61 percent among the fifty-five-to-sixty-nine-year-olds and only 30.2 percent among the seventy+ group). As the younger groups succeed their elders, the likely impact will be more rather than less participation.

Are these figures good or bad? If your glass is always half empty, you might (rightly) point out that it is not good enough that the numbers are as unequal as they are and that so many of our

56. Régis Bigot, Emilie Daudey, Sandra Hoibian, and Jörg Müller, *La Visite des musées, des expositions et des monuments* (Paris: CREDOC, 2013), 18–23.
57. Adrian Franklin, *Anti-Museum* (London: Routledge, forthcoming 2019).
58. Mark Fraser, Mona museum director, personal communication with author, titled "Introduction and Explanatory Notes to MONA Archive 2007," August 2, 2013.
59. Carmichael, cited in Franklin, *Making of Mona*, 168.
60. Mathieu Copeland and Balthazar Lovay, eds., *The Anti-Museum: An Anthology* (Berlin: Walther König, 2017); Jesus Pedro Lorente, "From the White Cube to a Critical Museography: The Development of Interrogative, Plural and Subjective Museum Discourses," in *From Museum Critique to the Critical Museum*, ed. Katarzyna Murawska-Mutheius and Piotr Piotrowski (London: Routledge, 2016), 115–28; Paul McGillick, "Hobart's New Anti-Museum," *In Design Live*, 2011, <https://www.indesignlive.com/report/hobarts-new-anti-museum>; and M. H. Miller, "The Anti-Museum Director: Alanna Heiss on the 40th Anniversary of PS1 Contemporary Art Center," *Artnews*, Spring 2016.

citizens do not participate. If your glass is always half full you might think that these statistics are good relative to national participation rates as published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Both positions have some validity.

We should not forget that Mona and Dark Mofo are rich in contemporary art, which is typically less popular than traditional fine art galleries and festivals. To put this in context, a 2012 national survey in France found that while 23 percent of the population had been to a museum of fine art in the previous twelve months, only 13 percent had been to a museum of contemporary art.⁵⁶

We also asked residents of the working-class city of Glenorchy and the more middle-class city of Hobart to rate Mona's contribution to the life of the city on a scale where 0 = no contribution and 10 = contributes a lot. Half the people from Glenorchy ranked Mona's contribution at 9 and above and 71 percent ranked it at 7 or more; 58 percent of Hobartians ranked Mona's contribution at 9 and above and 90 percent ranked it at 7 or more. Only 14 percent of Glenorchy residents ranked it 5 or below, compared with just 7 percent of Hobartians.

Conclusion

This article has described the making of a new midwinter festival in postcolonial Australia as well as key elements of its unfolding and impact. Much of the art exhibited features the grotesque body; it upends hierarchy and social convention; it is transgressive of social codes and cultural values. The curators deliberately emphasize the socially transformative *subjects* of art rather than its art history, so that their artists' intended messages are more effectively communicated and resonate more with the symbolic meaning of winter as a positive time for social change.

Dark Mofo may appear to be a merely commercial, if highly unusual, festival, emanating from a museum enterprise owned by one very wealthy man. This appearance needs to be modified, not least because it was never intended to be anything other than a philanthropic gesture from Walsh. In his philanthropic support of art, he is not unusual; this is how almost every major art collection has been assembled. What is so different is his intention to use his wealth to support art and cultural expression, but at the same time, to subvert the museological apparatus in the guise of "the modern museum" that has failed to realize its potential as a socially transformative institution.⁵⁷ By deploying a festive rather than a didactic register he hoped to be able to reach more people more effectively. One of Mona's key aims in its original brief stated: "Create an experience for visitors—David does not object to a 'fairground' experience. Strong emotions are welcome."⁵⁸ Carmichael described Mona's brand values in the following way: "Mona's brand values are: reason, radicalism, egalitarianism, pedagogy and pleasure. We will be: iconoclastic, radical, controversial, fun, brave. We will not be: conventional, didactic, highbrow, dumb, serious, dictated to."⁵⁹

Festivity of the carnival sort where "art meets life" was certainly the trope for Walsh's anti-museum.⁶⁰ He wanted artistic expression to be brought down to earth and meet its public unmediated by *art history* and a dubious cultural politics of "social improvement" that, in his view, never worked anyway. Working-class families like his stayed away and were never hailed by it; hence, the public exhibition of art missed its mark. He rigorously avoided becoming an alternative authority figure and has chafed at suggestions in the media that he was a new arbiter

61. Nick Prior, *Museums and Modernity: Art Galleries and the Making of Modern Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2002).

of taste. Sociologically, he has steadfastly played the role of a clown in the making of Dark Mofo, and, alongside a team of helpers, many from Tasmanian working-class backgrounds, he has been mocking and bringing the art establishment and conventional exhibition platforms down to earth, to the incredulity of the middle classes, who are far too cozy in their “appreciation” of art, and of the working classes who have for far too long been numbed by their alienation from it.⁶¹ At the same time, they have created a more theatrical and festive device to connect art to a broader social base, and they have done so by removing seriousness and authority from museum and other public art spaces and replacing it with immersive encounters, laughter, wine, music, free emotion, and sensuality. The aim is not to reject art but to connect it to its social, cultural, economic, and political contexts. Reading Mikhail Bakhtin and other accounts of the choreography of medieval carnival, we know that they were not *completely* spontaneous, that there were specific groups who organized, reproduced, and updated its expressive content such that contemporary crowds had something to react to, laugh at, resonate with, and find expression for. Like Dark Mofo, it was thus never merely the repetition of “tradition” but always immersion in the contemporary.

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